



Chemical Weapons Disposal Program

WHAT IS THE PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE?

The Department of Defense (DoD) is in the process of destroying the entire U.S. stockpile of aging and obsolete chemical weapons. The original stockpile contained 63 million pounds of chemical weapons disseminated at eight sites in the continental United States and at Johnston Atoll in the Pacific. Additional non-stockpile material, such as buried chemical warfare material, is located at more than 200 sites in the United States and U.S. territories. The entire stockpile must be destroyed to comply with the Chemical Weapons Convention Treaty. The health of workers and the general public near the storage and disposal sites must be protected during this process.

WHAT HAS CDC ACCOMPLISHED?

Congress charged CDC with public health oversight of DoD's chemical weapons disposal program. As of November 2004, more than 19.5 million pounds of chemical agents and weapons have been safely destroyed. To ensure protection of the public's health, CDC has:

- reviewed disposal plans,
- participated in facility safety reviews,
- helped in the development of critical chemical agent monitoring systems,
- revised recommendations for worker and general public exposure limits to the chemical agents that could occur during disposal, and
- developed baseline community guidelines for medical readiness for use in the event of a chemical agent release and used these guidelines to review several communities for medical readiness. The guidelines now serve as a basis for medical readiness planning for all communities that are required to prepare for potential agent releases from the chemical weapons stockpile sites.

Buried or abandoned chemical weapons have been removed from several sites; including the Rocky Mountain Arsenal, Dover, Delaware, Spring Valley (a suburb of Washington, D.C.), Memphis Army Depot, a residential site in Guam, England Air Force Base in Louisiana, Raritan Depot in New Jersey, and Fort Meade in Maryland. In each of these instances and for other similar sites, CDC provided technical support to ensure the Army has followed a rigorous chemical agent monitoring program and implemented other key safety provisions necessary to ensure appropriate corrective actions are taken in the event of a release of a lethal chemical agent. To date, all such moves of retrieved chemical warfare materiel have been accomplished without adverse incident.

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

CDC will:

- Continue to protect the public's health and safety while carefully reviewing the disposal of the remaining 43 million pounds of chemical agents and weapons.
- Help the Army evaluate new agent monitoring techniques, destruction technologies (such as chemical neutralization at four sites), and system safeguards for existing disposal facilities and for those under construction.
- Respond to special requests from Congress, state and local health authorities, and other involved organizations as appropriate to address issues of potential public health concern.

For information on this and other CDC and ATSDR programs, visit www.cdc.gov/programs.

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